



Legislature 2004 5th District Report

For residents of the 5th District

Rep. Jay Rodne

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Dear Friends,

The 2004 legislative session is now in the books. Legislators will reconvene in January 2005 for a 105-day legislative session.

Let me begin by saying **it's an honor and privilege to represent the 5th District**. In the last few months I've heard from many of you. I've appreciated your thoughts and feedback. The most important aspect of serving as your state representative is hearing your concerns and ideas and then translating this into action down in Olympia. I'm proud to report that we had many successes this session.

My priorities for our district continue to be **building a world-class education system, easing traffic congestion, making health care more accessible and affordable, and creating and preserving jobs**.

I was fortunate to be appointed to three House committees that allow me to be directly involved with the areas that I'm passionate about for our district – the House Transportation, Trade and Economic Development and Health Care committees.

Several bills were considered this session that impact our district. Among them was the passage of our supplemental budget, which is a mid-way adjustment to our state's main budget that is adopted every two years.

In the end, the compromise **bipartisan supplemental budget funds essential services while addressing other state needs**. We need to continue to be fiscally responsible to be sure your tax dollars are being used efficiently. Other important bills are also highlighted in this newsletter.

As I continue to work on behalf of our district, it's important for me to hear from you. **My job is to serve and represent you, so please don't hesitate to contact me**. You can reach me by leaving a message on the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000, or by e-mail at rodne_ja@leg.wa.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Rep. Jay Rodne

Representative Jay Rodne

A good year for K-12 education

As I talk to teachers, parents and students in our district, I hear that they want **local control of and accountability for their schools**. I strive for this and believe that strong communities and a vibrant economy start with a world-class primary and secondary education system.

The education of our children is the paramount duty of our state. Ensuring that we invest in our schools and our students is one of my highest priorities as your state representative.

This turned out to be an important session for K-12 education. Legislation passed that addressed the WASL, graduation requirements, levy equalization, charter schools and education funding issues. **Our students will no doubt benefit from these measures in the years to come.**

Some K-12 highlights from the 2004 session:

- Requirements for the WASL and graduation were clearly defined, allowing students multiple and different means of taking the WASL.
- The Learning Assistance Program was revamped, allowing for grants to focus more on impoverished areas and less on test scores.



- The school district levy base calculation was changed, allowing districts to keep more of the money they've raised.
- Historic charter schools legislation passed, allowing a limited number of new public charter schools to be created in the state.
- A work group was established to study long-term, comprehensive solutions as to how we should fund K-12 education.

Helping make health care insurance more affordable

Health care insurance is still not accessible and affordable to many people, especially those who work for small employers. This situation gets worse each year.

As Assistant Ranking Republican of the House Health Care Committee, I see **too many government rules that tell health insurers what they must put in their plans**. These requirements hurt consumers. Mandates mean more costs for health insurance providers, and these costs are then passed on to all of us.



The Legislature passed a bill that will **begin to provide the flexibility needed to help small employers provide affordable health insurance to their employees**. While it's a step in the right direction, more needs to be done. We must look for more comprehensive solutions in the future.

Saving our health care system

Medical malpractice insurance premiums are outrageously high and causing a crisis. Doctors and other health care providers are having trouble maintaining and establishing services, leaving consumers with fewer options and higher costs. With all the important advancements in medicine and technology, **higher costs and fewer options for consumers are unacceptable**.

We cannot let this crisis worsen. Insurance reforms are needed to help control costs, which should go a long way in enabling more employers to provide health insurance for their employees:

- Small-group insurance reform
- Long-term care financing
- Healthcare workforce development
- Childhood fitness and nutrition

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Creating and preserving jobs

Last year's bipartisan efforts to land the Boeing 7E7 – including **reforms to our workers' compensation and unemployment insurance programs** – were a step in the right direction in helping our state to become more competitive in the global economy. **This template should be applied for small employers in our state as well.**

The Legislature passed a bill this session that renews tax incentives for high-tech research and development industries. I believe **tax incentives create and preserve jobs and enhance our state's economic vitality.**

Despite this, Washington still has the 4th highest unemployment rate in the nation. When employers outside the state look to relocate, we are not viewed as inviting. The Legislature needs to continue to work on **building a business climate that creates jobs and fosters a growing economy.**

Last session, we missed some opportunities to move our economy forward. The following reforms will help create jobs and should be priorities in 2005:

- **Workers' compensation reform**

With rates up an average of 40 percent in just two years, several proposed reforms were introduced, including simplifying rate calculations, managing fraud, and getting employees back to work. Unfortunately, none of these bills passed.

- **Regulatory reform**

A bill was introduced to limit state agencies' rule-making authority and place the burden of proof on the agency's shoulders, not the employers'. This bill, too, did not pass.

- **Small business tax relief**

Small businesses now get a \$35/month business and occupation tax credit to encourage growth and make Washington attractive to small employers. A bill was proposed that would have increased the credit to \$50/month, but the bill did not receive a hearing.



Helping our senior citizens

We have senior citizens to thank for their myriad of contributions to our communities over the years. Their personal sacrifices have made our cities and towns better places to live and work.

Two measures passed this session that will give seniors much needed relief in property taxes and health care costs. While these were important steps forward, we must continue to look for more ways to assist seniors.

Property taxes

It's important we do all we can to help seniors protect their homes and assets. A bill that passed this session increases the amount of money an individual can earn and still be eligible for property tax exemptions. Also, if a person is on a fixed income and has a disability, they will now get more property tax relief.

Health care

Seniors who have Medicare Supplement insurance will now be able to save as much as \$300 a year on their premiums. Under a bill passed this session – which is already in effect and in time for annual renewals – seniors can now get discounts for using various payment methods. This includes electronic fund transfers or annual installments, and is applicable for spouses.

Seniors created this legislation and helped get it passed. I commend all those involved, including the state's largest senior organization – AARP Washington – for advancing this legislation. It's a hallmark example of how grassroots efforts can make a difference in people's lives.



Representative Jay Rodne

Easing traffic congestion and making roadways safer

Traffic congestion affects all of us on a daily basis. In addition to being an inconvenience, it poses safety concerns. Less traffic congestion means safer driving conditions, which is most important of all.

Many of you have contacted me with your concerns about our roadways and I share these frustrations. **Comprehensive solutions are needed to ease traffic congestion** and solutions begin with **securing the necessary funding** at the state level.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I'm committed to doing everything that I can to secure the necessary funding for improvements to State Routes 169, 202, 900, the I-90/Highway 18 interchange, and the other roadways of regional significance in our district.

In the supplemental transportation budget that was passed on the last day of the session, I'm pleased to report that we were successful in **securing \$550,000 for a State Route 169 corridor study to determine the long-term improvements that we need to make to this roadway.** Although this is a step in the right direction, we need to continue to work collaboratively with our partners at the local, county and state levels to identify and implement comprehensive solutions to the problem of traffic congestion in our region.



Communicating with you

I feel it's important to communicate with you so you can stay apprised of issues that impact our district and state.

Voters in Washington approved a campaign reform initiative that restricts state-paid legislative mailings during an election year. Since 2004 is an election year, the law allows me to only send two legislative mailings this year. This is the second of those two mailings.

I'm still allowed to provide direct responses to constituent-initiated contacts, however. So if you send me a letter asking for information, I will respond. However, I can't initiate contact through state-paid mail, fax or e-mail.

What's most important to your family? Please share your thoughts

I'd like to know your thoughts about the issues facing our communities and state. Please take time to share your thoughts and return them to the address provided. I hope to hear from you.

Rep. Jay Rodne, P.O. Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600.

You can also send your thoughts to my e-mail address: rodne_ja@leg.wa.gov

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